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WALKING FOR EXERCISE

A *Prevention*® Magazine report
from research by Louis Harris & Associates

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from research by
Louis Harris & Associates, Inc.

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Introduction

In recent years walking has become the preferred form of exercise for millions of people. Nearly three-fourths of American adults say they sometimes walk for exercise. Walking has major health benefits, from lowered stress levels to reduced risk of heart disease and stroke.

This report examines walking for exercise: who walks, how far they walk, how often they walk, what times of year they walk. It also looks at people who purchase and use walking shoes.

Information in this report comes from telephone surveys conducted for *Prevention* magazine by Louis Harris & Associates, Inc. These surveys, which are called the Prevention Index, are done annually. Information in this report comes from interviews with 1,254 adults in the continental United States, conducted during November, 1990. Results are projectable to the nation as a whole.

For further details about the survey method, see the Appendix.

Study highlights

Walking is the preferred form of exercise for millions of Americans.

* Seventy-three percent of adults say that they sometimes walk for exercise, a gain of eight percentage points since 1988.

* Walking for exercise has broad popularity, with all regions, ages, income and educational levels participating at nearly equal rates.

* More than half of walkers--58 percent--say that when they walk for exercise they go more than one mile, while another 11 percent say they walk exactly one mile.

* Twenty-nine percent of people who walk for exercise say they walk the same amount year-round, while 70 percent say their walking varies with the seasons.

A majority of people who walk for exercise do so regularly.

* Sixty-two percent of walkers say they walk for exercise every day or several times per week.

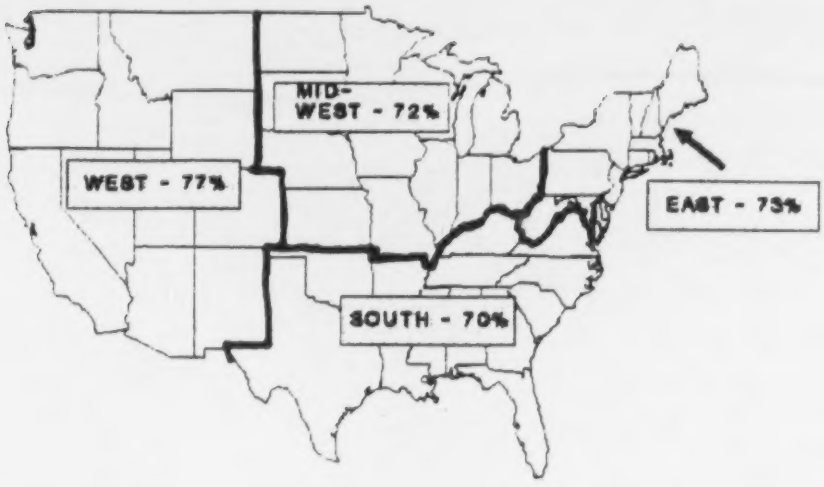
* People over the age of 50 are much more likely to be regular walkers than those under 50.

Walking shoes have grown in popularity very rapidly.

* Forty-nine percent of people who walk for exercise say they use special shoes designed for walking, a gain of eight points over 1990.

* Groups most likely to use walking shoes are women, people with some college experience or college graduates, and those over the age of 50.

People Who Walk for Exercise



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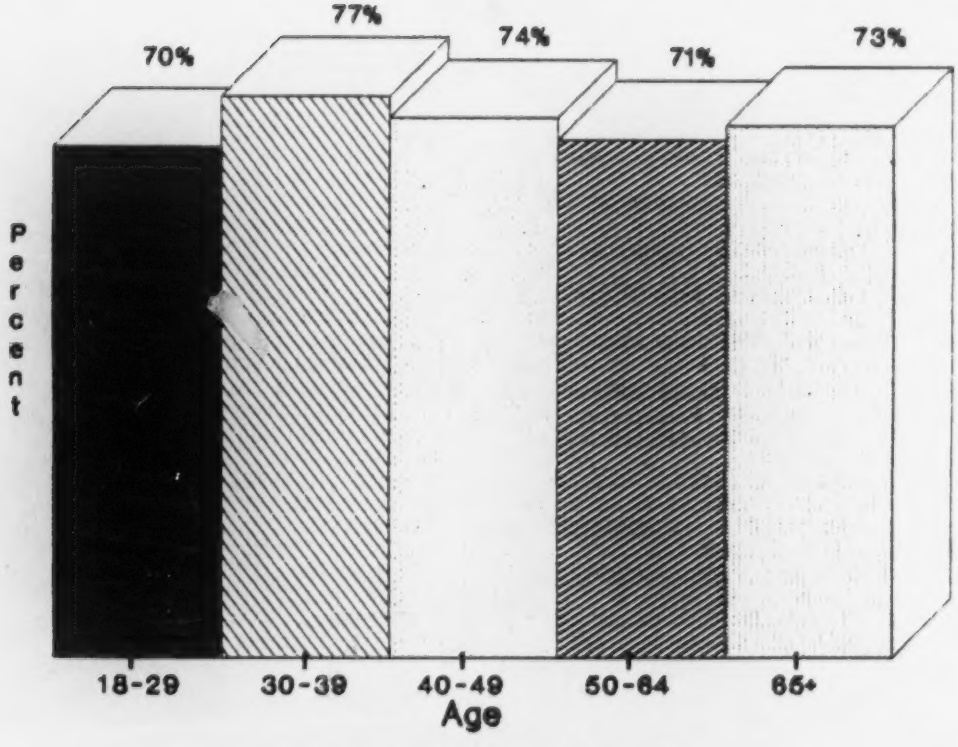
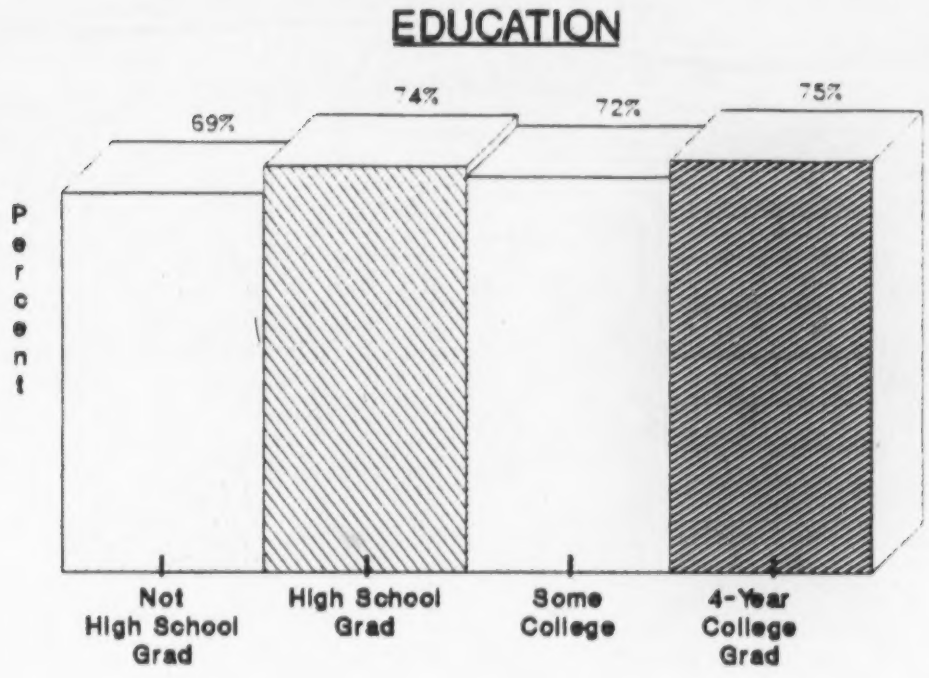
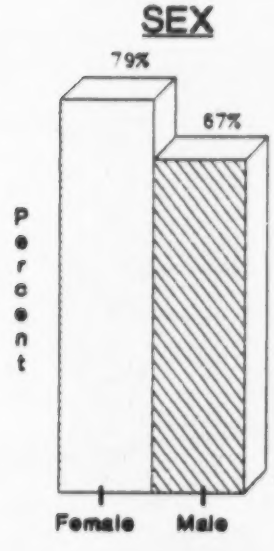


Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine.

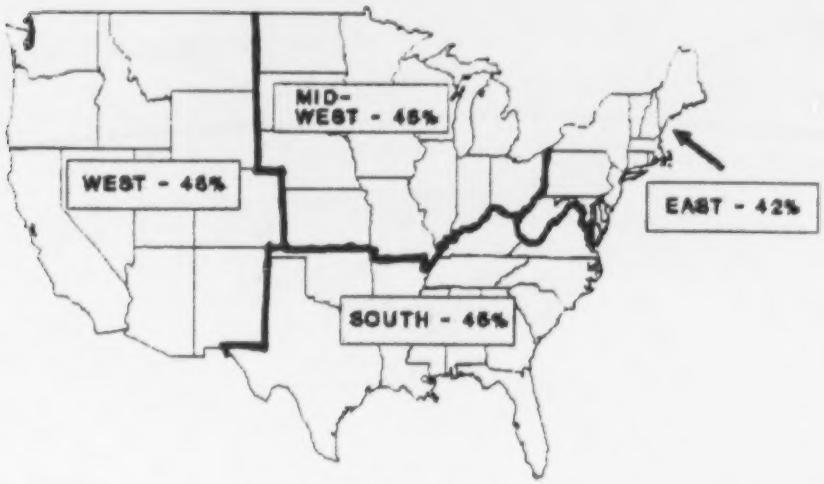
People Who Walk for Exercise

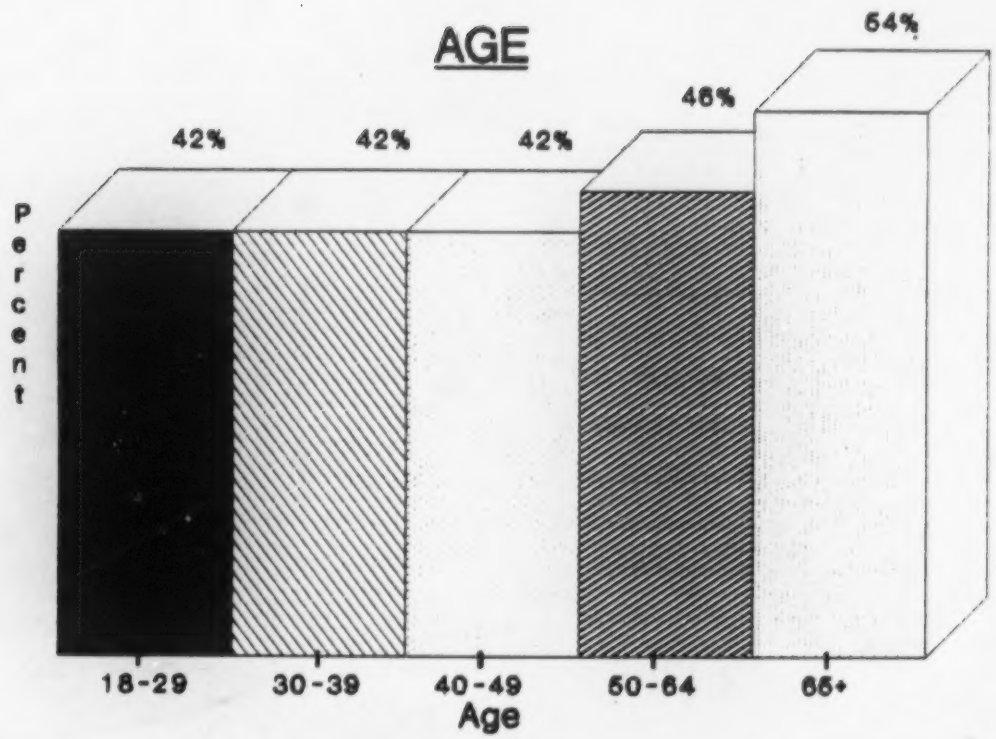




Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine.

Regular Walkers*



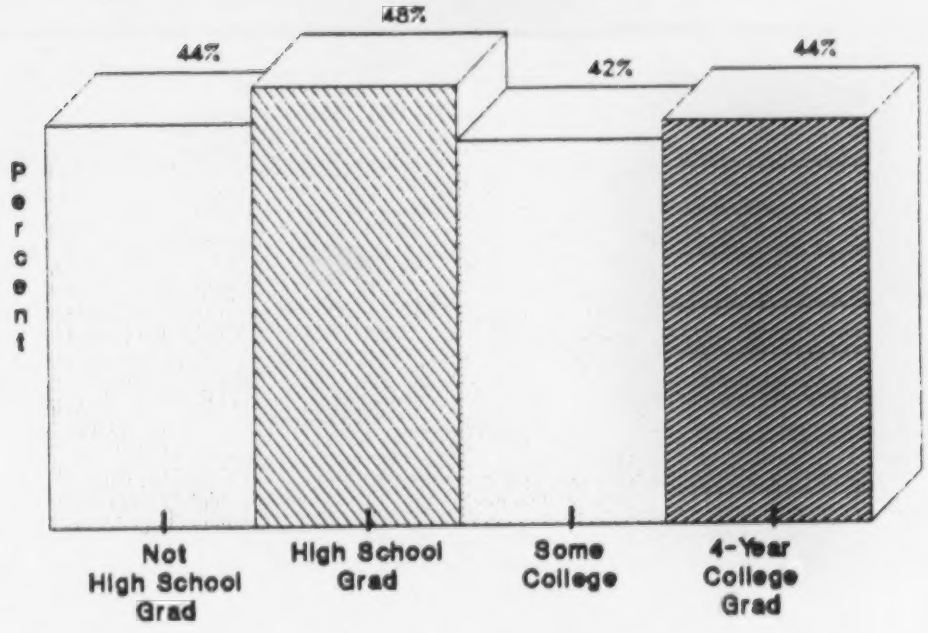


*People who walk every day or several times per week.

Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine.

Regular Walkers*

EDUCATION



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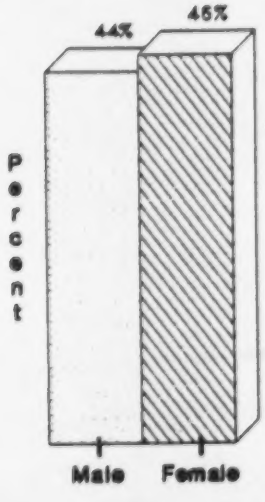
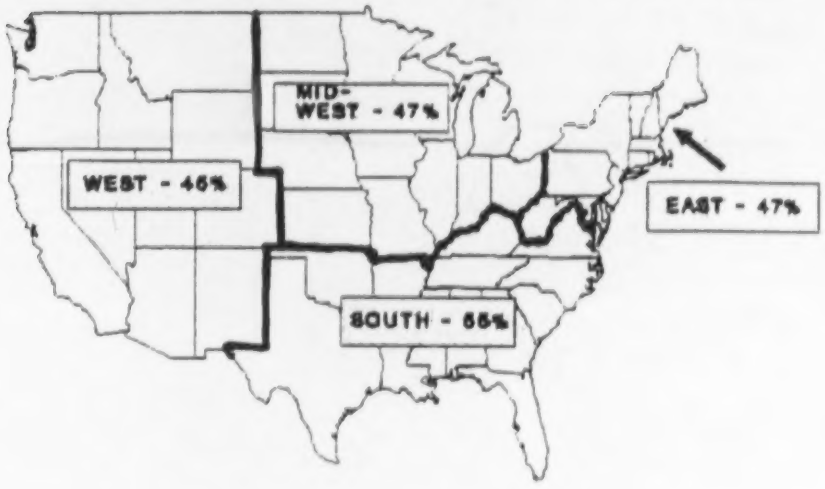
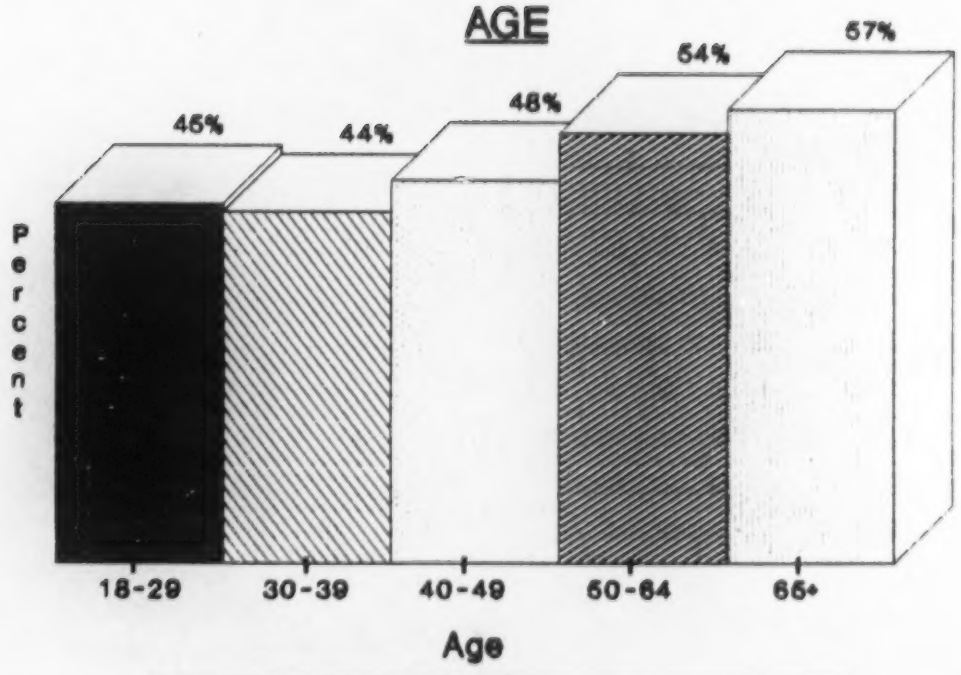


*People who walk every day or several times per week.
Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine.

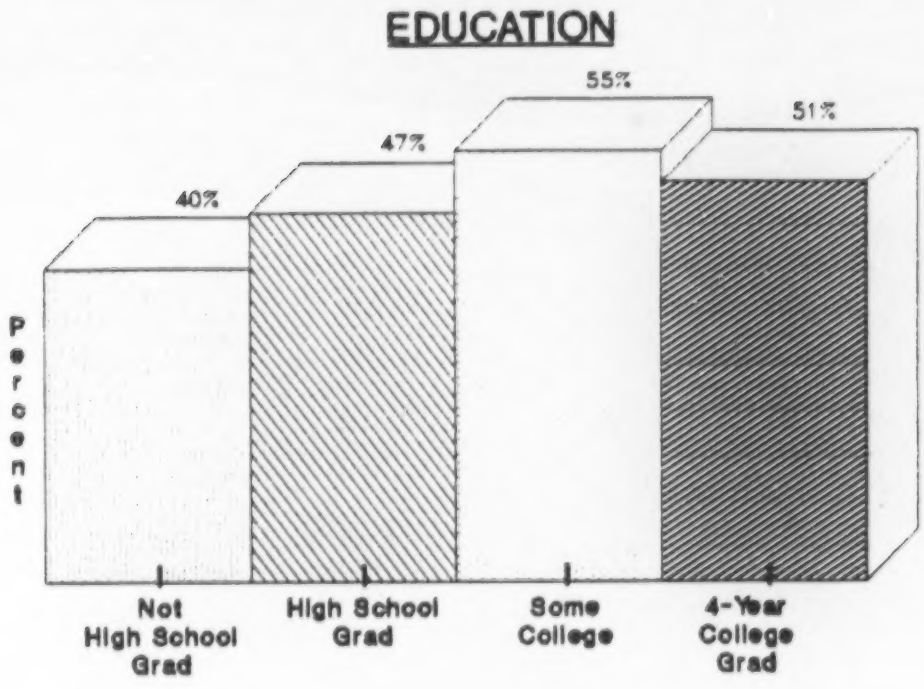
Walkers Who Use Walking Shoes

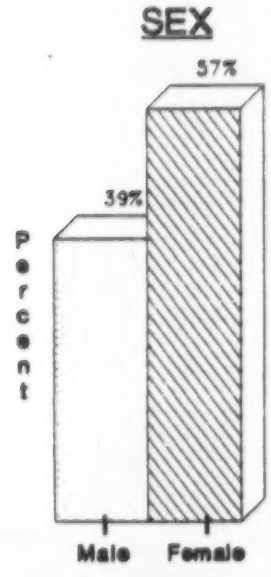




Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine.

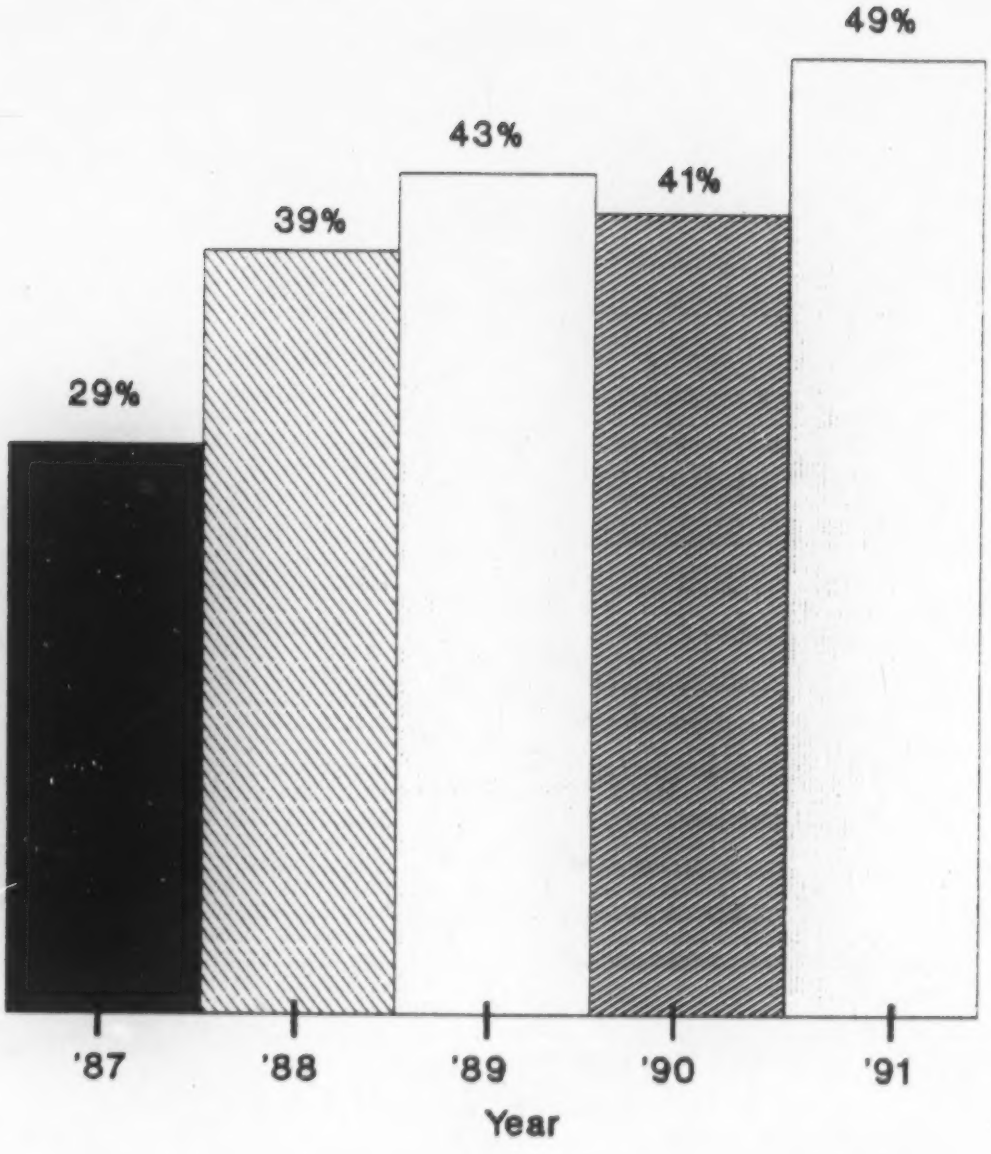
Walkers Who Use Walking Shoes





Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine.

Walkers Who Use Walking Shoes



Source: Louis Harris survey for Prevention Magazine.

Walking for exercise

Seventy-three percent of Americans over the age of 18 say that during the past month they did some walking for exercise. While this is slightly below last year's figure of 75 percent, it represents an eight-point increase in the number of walkers since 1988.

Most of these people are regular walkers. Sixty-two percent—some 82 million—say they walk several times per week or more. And more than half of this group walks for exercise every day.

Where the walkers are

Walking for exercise has broad popularity. Regional differences are minimal, with just seven points separating the West (where 77% of people walk) from the South (70%). People with annual household incomes below $25,000 are just as likely to walk for exercise as those with higher incomes. Similarly, educational levels seem to make little difference in walking rates.

Even age, which is usually a key distinguishing characteristic in health behavior, is not significant here. Walking is one of the few exercises where people over 50 have records comparable to those who are younger. And people who say their health is excellent, or good or very good, walk for exercise at only slightly higher rates than those who say their health is fair or poor.

The one factor that has a significant impact on walking for exercise is sex. Women are more likely to walk for exercise than men are, by a 79 to 67 percent margin.

Other walking facts

Americans have been walking longer distances when they do walk. Fifty-eight percent of walkers report that when they walk they usually walk more

than a mile—up from 52 percent in 1987. Thirty percent walk less than a mile and 11 percent walk exactly one mile.

Walking as exercise attracts a solid core of long-term enthusiasts. More than four in ten adults who walk for exercise have been walking for more than five years. An additional third have been walking for between two and five years, while 25 percent have been practicing this sport for less than two years.

Of all those who walk for exercise, 27 percent say they are walking more this year than last year. Forty-eight percent report that they are walking the same amount, while 25 percent say they are walking less than in previous years.

The seasonality of walking

Twenty-nine percent of people who walk for exercise say they walk the same amount year-round. But a strong majority—70 percent—say their walking varies with the seasons.

People whose walking regimen is less likely to vary during the year include Westerners (34%), men (36%) and people over age 50 (35%). Groups especially prone to seasonal changes in walking include Midwesterners (75%), women (75%), and those aged 30 to 39 (76%).

Among those whose walking varies with the seasons, 78 percent say they walk less in Winter, and 18 percent walk less in Summer. Just three percent report walking less in Spring, and two percent in Fall.

Not surprisingly, people in colder climates—such as the East or Midwest, are less likely to walk in Winter. Those in the South, and people over age 65, are more likely to limit their walking in Summer.

Important changes since 1990

While there were no major shifts in walking for exercise over the past year, there were some changes among subgroups. The gender gap widened from

nine points to 12 points, as the percentage of women who walk remained at 79 percent, and the men's number fell from 70 to 67 percent.

Regional differences increased as well, from just two points in 1990 to seven points in 1991. However, this still shows a remarkable uniformity across the country in the number of people walking for exercise.

Both young and old actively participate in walking for exercise. While there were small drops in the 18 to 29 group (down five points) and the 50 to 64 group (down six points), there was a corresponding gain among those aged 30 to 39 (up six points).

Walking also appeals to people in different states of health. While people who say their health is only fair or poor are less likely to walk for exercise than those in excellent, or good or very good health, they showed a three-point gain over the past year (from 65% to 68%), compared to slight drops for their healthier counterparts.

Regular walkers

Forty-five percent of adults—62 percent of walkers—say they walk for exercise every day or several times per week.

Neither region nor education seems to make a major difference in regular walking. Just six points separate the highest region (the West) from the lowest region (the East). And people who never finished high school have records identical to four-year college graduates when it comes to regular walking.

Surprisingly, there is virtually no gap between the sexes when it comes to regular walking for exercise. Forty-four percent of men are regular walkers, compared to 46 percent of women.

Both income and age do make a difference here, however. People over the age of 50 are much more likely to walk regularly than those under 50. Only 42 percent or those aged 18 to 49 are regular walkers, compared to 46 per-

cent of those aged 50 to 64 and 54 percent of those aged 65+. And people with annual household incomes below $25,000 are more likely to walk regularly than those with higher household incomes.

Walking shoes

Nearly half of people who walk for exercise—49 percent—say that when they walk they use special shoes designed for walking. This means that the number of Americans using walking shoes climbed by 14 percent over the past year, from 56 to 64 million.

Who buys walking shoes?

Walking shoes are more widely used in some regions than in others. Fifty-five percent of walkers in the South use walking shoes, compared to 47 percent in the East and Midwest, and just 45 percent in the West.

Annual household income seems to have little impact on the use of walking shoes, and education plays only a small role. Those with a high school education or less are slightly less likely to use walking shoes than those with some college experience or college degrees.

Both age and sex, however, are major factors in the use of walking shoes. Women are more likely to use walking shoes than men are, by a 57 to 39 percent margin. And people over 50 are much more likely to use these shoes than those under age 50.

Important changes since 1990

Over the past year, the percentage of walkers saying they use walking shoes jumped eight points, from 41 to 49 percent. The actual number of people who use walking shoes increased by eight million.

The use of walking shoes increased dramatically in the Midwest (+13 points) and the South (+11 points). The East showed a modest gain (+7 points), while the West struggled to maintain its share (-1 point).

This increase in the use of walking shoes was exceptionally broad, and included all age groups, income groups and educational levels. Key gains

were made by lower income people, those aged 18 to 29 (+14 points) and 65 and over (+12 points), and people with some college experience (+12 points).

Although both men and women increased their use of walking shoes, the gender gap broadened. Women's use of walking shoes climbed nine points, from 48 to 57 percent, while men gained seven points, from 32 to 39 percent. This leaves a gap of 18 points, compared to last year's difference of 16 points.

Appendix
Survey Methods

The information is based on interviews by Louis Harris & Associates, Inc., with 1,254 randomly selected adults in the continental United States. The interviews were conducted by telephone in November, 1990.

The Harris company breaks down the national sample by two dimensions: geographic region and metropolitan versus nonmetropolitan residence. This ensures that the sample will reflect, within one percent, those living in different regions of the country and those in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas.

In addition, these figures are weighted to the Census Bureau's latest population parameters on sex, race, age and income. This adjusts these key variables, where necessary, to their actual proportions in the population.

Sampling error

The results from a national survey are subject to sampling error. Sampling error is the difference between the results obtained from the sample and those that would have been obtained if the entire population had been surveyed.

For a survey of 1,254 people, the theoretical sampling error at 95 percent probability is plus/minus three percentage points. The table below shows sampling error for different-sized groups.

Recommended Allowance for Sampling Error of Proportions
(Plus or Minus)

	Approximate Magnitude of Results				
Approximate Sample Size	Survey Percentage Result at 10% or 90%	Survey Percentage Result at 20% or 80%	Survey Percentage Result at 30% or 70%	Survey Percentage Result at 40% or 60%	Survey Percentage Result at 50%
1,250	2	2	3	3	3
1,000	2	2	3	3	3
500	3	4	4	4	4
300	3	5	5	6	6
200	4	6	6	7	7
100	6	8	9	10	10